

STATEMENT OF SENATOR RICHARD BRYAN

Mr. Chairman, I commend you for calling today's hearing on the Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform Act, which focuses on certain business practices within the professional boxing industry.

The controversy surrounding many of the business dealings in the sport of boxing is the impetus for the legislation before us today. Several months ago this committee heard testimony from a boxing promoter, a manager, a state regulator, and a representative of a major sanctioning body on issues relating to business relationships between fighters, promoters, and managers and the impact of sanctioning bodies on the sport of boxing. The testimony we received at that time revealed, in my opinion, certain troubling business practices within the industry that called for reform.

One witness testified that he was aware that certain promoters have been taking the position that they will promote a given boxer or provide him with lucrative bouts only if the boxer signs with a specified manager. In addition, the witness testified to situations where a manager is actually a paid employee of a promoter or even a relative of the promoter. Given that one of the responsibilities of a manager is to represent a boxer in certain contract negotiations with a promoter, I am perplexed as to how this type of unethical arrangement can advance the interests of the professional boxer or the boxing industry in general.

In regard to the role of sanctioning bodies in rating professional fighters, we received testimony that it is a common practice of the ratings organizations to remove the champions of other organizations from their rankings. How does this practice serve the interest of professional boxing? Given the dozen or more sanctioning bodies claiming a different champion for each of its seventeen different weight classes, one can begin to see why it has become so difficult to arrange legitimate "championship" bouts.

The bill before us today would address these and other important issues, and it is an effort to sanitize the boxer/manager/promoter relationship and to build public confidence in the sport of boxing.

Another important provision of this bill requires certain financial arrangements between boxers, promoters, and sanctioning organizations to be disclosed to State boxing commissions prior to the fight being held. It is our intent that this requirement will allow State boxing officials to determine more effectively whether their own state laws and regulations concerning boxing contracts and financial arrangements are being followed. For example, in the State of Nevada, our Athletic Commission has promulgated rules that place certain restrictions on contracts between boxers and managers and boxers and promoters. In an effort to avoid forum shopping by promoters, I feel it is important to have a federal rule that imposes uniform requirements on all states.

Finally, I am aware of the concerns expressed by many promoters regarding the impact of television on the boxing industry. To the extent that contracts between boxers and television networks have made it more difficult to arrange bouts that the public would

like to see, I think it would be appropriate for this committee to examine these relationships as well, and to consider addressing this matter in the legislation before us today.

Mr. Chairman, all too often these days, it is the "business" of professional boxing that is stealing the headlines from the sport of professional boxing. The relationships that exist between boxers, promoters, managers, and sanctioning bodies is often so muddled that some boxers spend more time fighting in court than they do in the ring. The result of this never ending battle to control the destiny of professional boxers is that the fight fan is often left wondering who is the legitimate champion.

I firmly believe that the sport of professional boxing will continue to suffer from credibility problems until steps are taken to protect the boxer's interest vis-a-vis his relationship with his manager and promoter. In addition, the myriad of sanctioning bodies will continue to erode public confidence in the sport of boxing. The lack of an unbiased, private governing body to rank boxers and to impose necessary ethical guidelines on the industry is, in my opinion, one of the root causes of the problems that exist in professional boxing today.

I am hopeful that today's witnesses will offer constructive suggestions relative to this legislation. I especially look forward to the testimony of Dr. Jim Nave and Marc Ratner from the Nevada Athletic Commission.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for calling today's hearing, and for your leadership and efforts to improve the sport of professional boxing.